

HUMAN SECURITY AND CULTURE - A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Culture is a continuous process for sustaining identity, values, beliefs, traditions and different practices of certain groups of people. It plays a vital role in shaping and influencing politics, religion, ethnicity and individual attitudes etc. But the recent trends have forcefully brought out the political character of culture. India and the Indian culture often labeled as an amalgamation of several cultures and include traditions that are several millennia old. Now, culture is represented as a form of entertainment or an aesthetic pursuit of affluent people only in India. It has also made culture a tool for sheer entertainment to the masses by providing a high profit as a part of commodity production. In this paper, I will try to explain the threat to human security arising out of exploitation of culture with special reference to India which is one of the developing countries of Asia gaining prominence in all aspects of world politics.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Human Security, Globalization

INTRODUCTION

An Overview

Culture is a continuous process for sustaining an identity, values, beliefs, traditions and different practices of certain groups of people. If we look into the history, most cultures have exhibited unity through the fusion. Culture is one of the most twistingly evasive concepts to define; therefore there is not an overall definition of the concept. It plays a vital role in shaping and influencing politics; as in terms of religion, ethnicity and individual attitudes etc. Conventionally, culture is being projected as apolitical phenomena and linked with aesthetic pursuits. But the recent trends have forcefully brought out the political character of culture. The political character of culture can be traced back to the Marxist theorists when they identified it as an important weapon of class struggle. This understanding was further accelerated by Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci. The forms of culture cannot be separated from its mediating influence of class division and domination. In this world, people are inevitably wrapped with different practices of production. Culture is developed within the life of people though separately from the practices of production. It prepares people to enable them to get involved in political practices to transform or to mould the existing social equations of society. If we alienate culture from the lives of the people it will then lose its political values and purposes. Hence it will become the tool of sheer entertainment to the masses by becoming a commodity produced for high profit for the culture industry.

So, a given culture can be regarded as the ideological reflection of economic base and politics of a given society. Therefore, culture has always been an important agenda for forces seeking to establish hegemonic dominance over a people. The economic interest underlying the process of globalization results into the exploitation of culture to further these interests.

THE PROBLEM

Human security can be defined as the protection of individuals and communities. But here consensus breaks down over precisely what threats they should be protected from. In a narrow interpretation it includes violent threats to individuals or protection of individuals from internal violence. In the broader context it includes threats of hunger, disease and natural and human made disasters since these kill more persons than wars, genocide and terrorism do. The Human Development Report of UNDP (1994) provided seven separate components of human security:

- Economic security (assured basic income)
- Food security (physical and economic access to food)
- Health security (relative freedom from disease and infection)
- Environmental security (access to safe water, clean air and a non degraded land system)
- Personal security (security from physical violence and threats)
- Community security (security of cultural identity) and
- Political security (enjoyment of basic human rights and freedom).

Cultural security can be understood as the capacity of a society to conserve its specific character in spite of changing conditions and real or virtual threats: more precisely, it involves the permanence of traditional schemas of language, culture, associations, identity and national or religious practices, allowing for changes that are judged to be acceptable. A culturally secure environment cannot exist where external forces define and control cultural identities. Cultural Security recognizes that this is not an optional strategy, nor solely the responsibility of individuals, but rather involves society and system levels of involvement.

Today culture is an important component of domination, both of and within developing societies. The ideological apparatuses of state and of multinational agencies brought into being by technological revolution have ushered in this possibility. During the last couple of decades, culture industry in the capitalist west has undergone transformation beyond recognition. A very large volume of capital has gone into this industry. It is important to point out that our culture is our identity in the global community of nations and thus for maintaining this identity it is highly necessary that we preserved and closely monitored its growth and development – the evolution over the years. In the present context culture has been projected as non- political phenomena. But the Marxian and very particularly the Gramscian understanding of power has defined culture as a domain of power where ruling classes manufacture legitimacy for their rule or where anti establishment forces manufacture a new form of consent by establishing the present power equation.

Traditionally the state was projected as the only legitimate power structure of a given society. So, politics was supposed to be revolved around the state. Earlier liberal discourse on state-civil society dichotomy and its insistence on a line of demarcation between the political and the social spheres provided legitimacy to this narrow understanding of politics and power. But later, the Marxist and the postmodernist discourses lighted upon the multiple domains of power in the society. According to this, state is the most dominant domain of power among others. Here mention can be made about various non state domains like the economy, technology, education, ideology and most importantly culture. All these are

also recognized as political domains as all these are characterized by constant struggles for domination and subjugation. In this regard Antonio Gramsci opined that these domains are used by ruling classes in a society to manufacture consent and legitimacy for their rule. Hence these non state domains have been filled up with completely new values, ideas and consciousness. It resulted into an alternative hegemony in the society which threatened the particular classes already benefiting from the existing power structures and equations. Due to this threat, those classes are trying to project all the domains as non-political. Culture is not beyond it. So, efforts have been made as a part of new strategic move to depoliticize culture through different forces. Appropriating culture of a people has always been important agenda for forces seeking to establish hegemonic dominance over a people. This appropriation, however, has never been so much subtle in design, endemic in scale, and successful in execution under the contemporary process of globalization.

HUMAN SECURITY AND CULTURE

Human security is based on the fundamental understanding that Governments play the primary role of ensuring survival, livelihood and dignity of their citizens. History has witnessed cross-cultural divides which acted as sources of tensions and conflict, which in turn have severely affected human security. So, cultural differences have provided the backdrop for conflict and insecurity. Although the creation of the League of Nations in 1919, and its successor, the United Nations in 1945, demonstrated the human potential to build an international order based on the convergence of peoples, religions and races; today, the world remains fragmented by sustained cultural divides. Therefore, cultural imperialism is the order of the day, but at the same time, culture is being deployed as an instrument of imperialism. Cultural imperialism legitimizes itself on the plea that in modern time's isolation is neither possible nor desirable. There is no place for closed door policies any more, as the world is moving towards a global village. The cultures, therefore, have to meet necessarily and to enrich and universalize through mutual interaction.

As the capitalist economy has grown in influence and power, much of our culture has been commoditized. Its use value increasingly takes second place to its exchange value. Nowadays we create less of our culture and buy more of it, until it really is no longer *our* culture. We now use a special term for culture which is rooted in popular practice. We call it "folk culture," which includes folk music, folk dance, folk medicine, and folk mythology. So, we can say that all culture arises from the social practices of folks. Moreover a greater part of our culture is now described as "mass culture," "popular culture," and even "media culture," It is owned and operated mostly by giant corporations. Their major concern is to accumulate wealth and to have social control rather than social service. Though it is apolitical in its intent, entertainment culture or the entertainment *industry* reflects political impact, propagating images and values that are sometimes sexist, racist, consumerist, and imperialist.

With the decline of mass culture we see a loss of people's culture. The commodification of culture can be seen in the decline of children's culture also. The television has taken children away from their hobbies and street games. A profit-driven mass culture preempts people's culture, is extending all over the world, as third-world critics of cultural imperialism repeatedly remind us.

Demand creates supply. But often supply creates demand. Capitalism will sell the camera to make a movie and the computer to write a book. It has been fueled by the globalization which is associated with the rapid growth of global advertising, and improved communications technology which has facilitated cross-border operations and control. The changes have strengthened the applicability of the propaganda model. Moreover it has seriously weakened the public

sphere which refers to the platform where matters of democratic community are debated. Along with that information relevant to people and citizen participation is provided. This power of marketing and advertising has caused the displacement of a political public sphere by a depoliticized consumes culture. And it has created effect of creating a world of virtual communities on the basis of different demographics and different tastes of consumers. This consumption does not match with the physical communities that share a social life and common concerns and which participate in a democratic order.

Indian Context

India is a land of diversity in all its aspects. The cultural diversity is unique in its form which can be traced back to ancient times. Indian civilization began to evolve during the Vedic period and supplemented by the rise of Buddhism and Jainism and was further flourished with Bhakti movement. Unity in diversity has been used to reinforce nationhood and peaceful co-existence. India is known for its diversity which owes from its colonial rule, religious movements and spiritual discoveries. But with the advent of globalization in 21st century, market forces emerged which have altered the diversity specially the cultural diversities. The process of globalization has augmented the minimization of diversity as it surpasses pre-existing political, economic and most importantly cultural barriers. For example, in a remotest village, a youth choose to prefer to wear jeans and to eat burger as against the local clothing or local food.

It is presumed that globalization is a challenge to cultures, in particular, to marginalized communities and their identities. The Indian society has historically inherited some special features which include caste based plurality of communities, plurality of cultural patterns and styles at the local and regional levels. Moreover India is very much adaptive to outside cultural traditions through centuries. The contact with the western civilization which has overwhelming influence on its culture for the reason that the institutional and cultural innovations they introduced in the society had an enduring appeal to the Indian elite as a paradigm of modernization.

In the context of the tribes of Northeast, it is feared that globalization may bring in large-scale commodification of their cultures by erasing their unique identities that are mostly based on the premise of ethnic difference. Beyond and besides identity, it has affected cultural products such as indigenous music, textile designs, handicrafts, herbal medicines, dance forms and so on.

The tribes like the *Bodo* and *Mishing* weavers have expertise in the textile products. It can be linked up with the world market but due to lack of resources they failed to do that. The fashion designers and other business players have taken some interest in the ethnic textiles of these local communities. This intervention has brought massive stress on preservation of tradition. The weavers for decades without any support from the Government and without a viable market for their products have suddenly wakened up to a new opportunity. It is true that traditional textile of the ethnic communities needs further exposure and they will be benefited economically. But modernization has been made to the ethnic dresses of the local ethnic groups in the absence of adequate protection. It is feared that will be hijacked from the community itself.

The ethnic textile products, like *Bodo dokhona* made of the finest pat silk and *muga* silk and *Mishing mekhela* and *ribi gacheng* and *galok* have become popularized in the market. The Assamese variety of the *muga* and *pat* silk clothes is also renowned as commercial success story. But due to lack of patent, the producers of the material at the local level are

gradually losing their commercial potentiality. This kind of question arises only where the local products feel threatened in the competitive market and there is no institutional control and monitoring. Moreover, the people are still ignorant of such dangers of their products being hijacked.

Again the folk music and dance forms of tribal communities are under threat. *Bihu* is the most important non-religious festival of the Assamese people. No culture can be preserved in its original form. It is bound to change. The modern day *Bihu* songs and dances, apart from the colorful ethnic dances of the region like *Bagrumba* of the *Bodos*, *Gumrag* or *Mishing Bihu* of the *Mishings*, have become very popular these days. But the rapidity with which the songs and dances have changed and modernized to cater to the market forces is really a matter of concern.

The modern songs produced by the entertainment industry have amalgamated the world of music and resulted into a pure hybrid of many influences and borrowings popularly known as fusion music. This is the direct and indirect result of the impact of media and globalization. This perspective addresses the enormous economic and cultural impact of globalization which is mostly perceived as a threat to the continued existence of this heritage itself.

Efforts for Survival

It is important to say that our culture is our identity in the global community and thus for maintaining this identity it is highly necessary that we preserved and closely monitored its growth and development. Preservation is a highly significant aspect that needs to be seriously explored today as it is high time we implemented necessary and adequate steps for preserving our cultural heritage for the future generations. Preservation helps in proper documentation of our cultural heritage and lifestyle. The documentation process helps in making comparisons about the changing trends and versions of our cultures at different points of time in future. If we document a certain prevalent cultural aspect in audio- visual form, then after a decade or so, when there will be a interest in reviewing them or comparing them with the then prevailing version, it will become a great help to understand them. Another significant option is community media established and run by every community in which it function in the society. Recognizing the rich cultural heritage of the ethnic groups of India, The Union Ministry of Tribal affairs adopted a national policy on tribal which has taken relevant steps for preservation and development of diverse cultures. These endeavors would go a long in delivering the desired goals and thereby help us in keeping our cultural heritage robust and healthy for future generations after many decades when future generations might want to know what our cultures looked like.

CONCLUSIONS

Our culture and heritage should be enriched by healthy and meaningful inputs from others from time to time and thereby are able to deliver a synthesized cultural entity for the future generations. Because individual identities are no longer produced within the confines of national borders but are the product of several national narratives. Cultural identity plays a role in how individuals perceive themselves and provides a sense of belonging to a community. Self-perception and a sense of belonging provide a perspective from which to consider external influences. Threats to the security of culture have raised the risk in the affairs of the state. As a first step, nations have realized the practical significance of their culture to national security. The emerging relationship between cultural property and human rights suggests the relevance of cultural components to human security. The present system, thus, undermines cultural identity and, thereby, compromise human security. In such cases, cultural and human security intertwines.

To conclude, culture as a way of human life is constantly undergoing change. Certain developments in modern times have helped to accelerate this process of change. Faced with that inevitability, we should not lose sight of human security, an exchange among equals in which cultures borrow from each other judiciously and selectively, and they should not be the brand names, but good ideas.

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